

2-24-19 - Recovering the Image of God in Us

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

My computer is very old actually, I've been using them like five years and even like, I have three of them and 10 of them is, excuse me, the third one is about 10 years old. And as you know these old computers have a recovery CD that came. And so when the computer started, jammed up like the computer is messed up by us, we just run the recovery CD. And it takes time. And you know God created man in His image and likeness, in His image and likeness. So I can say man created computer in his image and likeness.

So computer just behaves exactly like we do as we all know and especially mine. And the other thing is lately this internet is part of our life and so computer picks it up like a, it used to be like, do you like to download this program? Yes and no and you select or cancel. However nowadays the computer itself starts downloading without me knowing what's going on. And then when you do disc cleaning, my goodness all these things were downloaded in my computer. How did it happen? And then this is almost like us, we go around, talk to people and we download a lot of things, knowingly and unknowingly.

And so we are kind of full of information in us, and like computer, we start wondering what's going on in my life, this and that and we are really confused and especially if certain relationship don't go well, then we start wondering about ourselves. And that is the time we have to use recovery CD. Now what is this recovery CD for us? When the one who created us came to this world, our Lord Jesus Christ. He run the course of human life and left a living CD of Christian life. And the church is that, I would say it's not just a simple CD, but as we all know it contains everything, all about Christian life which is the image and likeness of Christ.

So, what we do is once a year we get together in church and put recovery CD and we try to recover ourselves, that is the effort we make during great lent. Now I have to tell you something that faith without understanding is superstition. And I wouldn't call it superstition maybe but emotional Christianity. True Christianity is our understanding of Christian life and Christ Himself. And although at the time of baptism, this Christian life is installed in us. We prepared ourselves, and we got ready, and then we downloaded all the information, not just kind of intellectual but physical, psychological and it's not just spiritual but like a whole life, we downloaded through church and we are well equipped for this life.

However like I said, we start talking to people and all kinds of ideas coming in, we download information. And so great lent is a time to do some disc cleaning, we have to go over ourselves. And then check up all the details of our life, ourselves, how we are, and praise for Sundays, today is the second Sunday of the preparatory Sundays for great lent. And these weeks we have to have something, we have to have four important aspects of this recovering ourselves, or recovering the image and likeness of Christ in us. And the first as we heard last week about humility and then today repentance and forgiveness and then next week prayer and fasting, and the importance of love.

Now the last Sunday of preparatory period is most important because if we have true humility and the spirit of repentance and forgiveness, and prayer and fasting in us, then we become, we start this recovering the image and likeness of Christ and we start seeing this in the fruit of love

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in our life. Now, so we started last week, we learned about humility, humility of the tax collector. Now this humility is nothing kind of religious, we think, oh we have to be humble and, before God and before others and make an effort to be humble. But humility does not come that way at all as we all know otherwise it becomes false humility.

Now the prodigal son we tend to, if I give a homily on the prodigal son itself, of course there are two points, repentance of the prodigal and forgiveness of the father. And this parable is very Shakespearean. Of course Shakespeare is like a much later and then he quotes a lot of biblical verses in his stories. But, this prodigal son is only used in the story of King Lear and out of, totally out of context. Now what we have to here remember, that prodigal son's, we would like to focus on prodigal son's repentance, how he came to repent.

But this repentance has something to do with humility. If you don't have humility, we cannot quite repent. Now repentance is not a kind of very narrow act, our act before God like, oh I did this and that and then you know this and that, but all these are included by prodigal son pain to himself after using up everything he received from his father. And in the pig pen he got hungry because of the famine, nobody had nothing to eat. So he looked at the pig's food and then like husks, and then wanted to even eat and then, "What am I doing? What am I thinking? How did I get here?" All these things, the feelings came up to him and he said, "I should go back to father."

So this is of course the example of repentance but before we think about this, his example of repentance, we have to know that he had this humble experience. He himself, actually humiliated himself and became humble and then started thinking. In this process of thinking, what he did was he stepped back, "What am I doing? What is this? And why do I want to eat this pig food?" And then he decided to go home. Now the stepping back is very, very important. Unless we step back, we cannot repent. We all know, you know like a wife says, "I'm sorry dear I said this and that," but if it is not truly from her heart, husband will say, "Oh yeah, oh yeah again."

And then the same way the husband apologize, "I'm sorry dear, I said this and I did this, and then oh again and again I'm sorry," and then this is not true repentance because he is still there. And what we have to remember is, when we live close, when we live together we get too close. Your wife is always before you, or a husband is always before you, or your children are always before you and you are before them and always pushing, pulling, tag wars. But we must remember you know good, I would say, good old American expression, "Back off! Back off!" And great lent is a time to learn, back off, make a big stepping back from your wife, from your husband, from your children, from your work and like the prodigal son did, "What am I saying to my wife? What am I doing to my children? How am I behaving to my colleagues?" All these things come.

So in other words, stepping back gives us room to think how we are and how others are. Now here comes back off, how much do we have to back off? You know Christ our Lord said, "If you want to follow me, take up your cross." But that's one recording. The other recording says, "If you want to follow me, deny yourself and follow me." And denying yourself is exactly this action of back off. In other words, not me but him or her or them, they come first and I back off. Then I will start seeing everything what's going on. This is a very, very important thing that we back off

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so that we understand each other better. We know why or what, I would say, my wife, for example I back off and then I see my wife is doing this and that where there is a room, so I start thinking, oh she's doing this because of this and because of that, and then you start understanding the situation.

And the better you understand the situation, the better you become forgiving and understanding. And this is the step of recovering the image of likeness of God in us. Now, Christ our Lord says, "Deny yourself," how much? Like forgiving, how much do you forgive? Christ our Lord says, "Seventy times seven, and also each time." And so back off, Lord how much to we back off? We back off all the way to day one. Do you remember day one when you were born into this world? Nobody remembers because you were just in this world just brand spanking new and then you're just crying.

This first day is very important, the reason why is today, how we are, what we are, it is kind of after picking up, downloading all kinds of informations and picking up all kinds of knowledges and everything. And we have to be very wise what we need and what we don't need. And great lent is the time to eliminate all these things we don't need and back to the original the way we were created. And how do we experience this? And if we are in our 20s, 30s it's really hard. But as we get older, you start seeing everything, and then you start appreciating this world more.

And like it's really, last week, I mowed the lawn and whacked weed. And amazing just two or three days, they are back, growing. And this experience is, made me think, my goodness, this is what my mentor at the seminary said, "John you are participating in life, God is giving you daily, participating." And so when I was younger I didn't understand, participating in life, what do you mean by that? Because my life is mine and his life is his and hers, everybody has his or her life, and we are all sharing life, I understand. Yet now I started seeing, I am part of this growing process. The weed, trees, birds, everything I see, they are all growing daily and I see they are living and that's life I am partaking of. And this life is created by God.

And this is the result of back off. Now I would like to mention about his backing off and repentance. Quoting, mentioning two episodes found in the chapter named Russian Monk in The Brothers Karamazov written by Dostoevsky. And Dostoevsky is an orthodox Christian writer and the first time that I found out about Dostoevsky and I read his novels, I was really impressed and I thought he was such a great man, writing all these human life, like about what sin or what the human life with tragic situations and how man survives. And then as I learned about Dostoevsky, I found out that he drunk a lot, he smoke a lot and he had, he did everything.

Like womanizing and then it's sort of like, my goodness this writer writing all these and then doing all that, you know like how, I could not reconcile two sides of him. And then, when I started reading Brothers Karamazov, I found out the last piece he wrote after going through many times of hell starting from his epilepsy. And epilepsy hit him like whenever. And it's a terrible experience, you don't know when you're attacked and death comes, and each time you survive. And this closeness to his death, he started thinking about his life and in the end, after his youngest son died, he wrote Brothers Karamazov.

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And this is a result of his backing off and observing what happened to his life. And he let this chapter, chapter six in Brothers Karamazov, explains about this elder Zosima. And this elder Zosima, in his young days, elder Zosima before he became a monk there are two big events in his life. He, the day before he was going to the dual, he got drunk and he was an officer in the military service. And then he came home and he was totally drunk. And then he beat his servant, no reason. He went into the house and he called, Zinovy is the name of the servant, and he started beating and looking at him beating him and his face getting bloody and all that.

But this Zinovy a server, didn't respond, he stood firm looking at him, and that impressed him. And next day when he woke up and he opened up the window and looked at his garden, he felt like he was looking into paradise. Then whole life changed and he went downstairs and called Zinovy and he knelt before him, bowed down and said, "Forgive me." And this experience, he, Dostoevsky mentioned something about not exactly the term, but he saw the image and likeness, beautiful image and likeness of Christ in Zinovy. And here I am, all confused and don't know what to do, but like because of Zinovy, he stepped back and realized what he was doing. And then he changed his life about his way of life.

And the second change, the repentance came that his brother attended the divine liturgy, presanctified liturgy during holy week and he is completely changed. He was atheist but he became to believe in God. Now these pieces and literature teaches. And of course the reason why I mention is that repentance, humility, all these things, each one of us has to do in his own way. There isn't like kind of packaged deal and then here you are, you do this whole humility thing and then you'll be okay and then repentance thing, you're okay. But not at all, each one of us has to back off from what we are facing daily and ponder upon them and approach once again with a spirit of, Lenten spirit.

Then we realize gradually we are started recovering the image and likeness of Christ. And on Pasca Day, whole heartedly, we can say, Christ is risen, indeed He's risen. Because His image and likeness is risen in us and total recovery is done and we can start living again. And so great lent is a great opportunity to download Christian life once again and start a new. Amen.